Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549

Bulletin, Vol. XI, No. 2 January, 1985

President: Ray Peters Newsletter Editor: Nancy Midwood

FROM THE PRESIDENT . . .

In the early days, Benicia served as a base for surveying operations in Contra Costa County. The following are the opening paragraphs of a (lengthy) letter to Saml. D. King, Esq., Surveyor General of the United States, from Leander Ransom, Deputy Surveyor, dated September 20, 1851. (Mr. Ransom established the first survey station atop the mountain, and this letter recounts his difficulties.)

"...Having made the necessary purchases of provisions, tools and camp equipage, and hired three men, we left San Francisco July 11th on the afternoon boat, and landed in Benicia that evening. Major Allen of the Quartermaster's Department, stationed at Benicia, having kindly offered to furnish me with such horses, mules and vehicles belonging to the United States, as we might need, and that were not in immediate requisition for the use of the troops, we made the necessary arrangements on Saturday, and on Monday having hired two additional men, making the party six in all, as soon as the tide permitted, we embarked in a small sailing vessel, crossed the bay, and passed up a creek about 8 miles, when we made a landing at a place called the 'Embarcadero'. From this place we conveyed our camp equipage to Bishop's Ranch, near the foot of Mt. Diablo on the west side, where we encamped. . ."

(One of Mr. Ransom's difficulties was that he could not find, on top of the mountain, "...a stick suitable for a flag staff..." Too bad he didn't use some of the comma splices from his letter.)

Ray Peters
President

IMPORTANT DATES ---- circle them on your calendar !!!

January 22 at 8 p.m., Lafayette School: Benicia's Historic Past.

May 14, Veterans' Hall: Annual Meeting of the Lafayette Historical Society.

BENICIA'S HISTORIC PAST

is the topic of our January 22 meeting, which will be held at 8 p.m. in the auditorium of the Lafayette School on School Street (across from the Town Hall).

The speaker will be Kathryn Leland, a member of the Contra Costa County Historical Society and former president of the Orinda Historical Society. Her slide presentation on Benicia was prepared as part of her training as a docent at the Oakland Museum.

You may recall some of Benicia's history. It was the first of two cities incorporated in the newly formed State of California in 1850. Prior to that date the U.S. Army had located barracks in the hill above the straits, and these served as the nucleus for the arsenal established in 1852 and in use until 1968. A number of the army buildings still stand - of particular interest are the old camel barns.

For a period during 1853 and '54 Benicia served as the state capital. The legislature was housed in a handsome building which still stands. It has been restored by the state department of Parks and Recreation, and is open to the public.

In addition to buildings and sites, many of which are not usually accessible, Ms. Leland has photographed documents and the contents of a scrapbook assembled by an early settler.

Put this event on your calendar now. In case you're wondering, yes, your guests are invited also.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Angela Broadhead reorts that our society was invited to do a session on oral history at the Moraga Seniors' Book Review Group meeting in November. She demonstrated basic oral history tecniques and encouraged attendees to record oral histories of family and friends during the holidays.

Joan Merryman is another member who keeps the public much aware of out organization. During the past year there have been five displays at Conti's Camera Shop. These featured trains, Lafayette schools, kitchen equipment and tools, plus (currently until January 3) "Children and Christmas." The latter is a collection of pictures of children of Lafayette also toys and games.

Joan wishes to thank our members who have shared their treasures with Lafayette in the past year: Bron Heuer, Caroline Young, Herb Breckling, Territa Lowenberg, Jane Gregory, Tony Finger and Alice Johnson. The assistance of the Moraga Historical society and Warren Miller are much appreciated as is, of course, the kindness of Conti's Camera Shop which has made show window space available on a continuing basis.

NOTEWORTHY ADDITION TO THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTION

Alice McNeil Russi, a charter member of the Lafayette Historical Committee, which was a fore-runner of our society, has aided us many times with her pictures and knowledge. Her part in our activities was recognized by an honorary life membership. Recently she donated a number of articles to our collection: her white dress and petticoat worn when she was four years old; an Indian mortar from Happy Valley; many clippings and important pictures of residents of Lafayette in the late 1800's; an assessment book (dated 1873) for the new school; numerous books on the history of Contra Costa County; a geneology of the Allen family plus many other items.

CHANGE IN DATE - NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD

The next Directors' meeting was planned for Tuesday January 15. It has been changed to Wednesday January 23. Time and place are the same: 7:30 at the home of George Wasson.

BOOKS MAKE GREAT GIFTS

Yes, it's too late to consider these items for Christmas presents, but keep them in mind for future occasions or your own family's pleasure:

First, your society's own publications:

"La Fayette - A Pictorial History" ($6.00) and "The Improvers of Lafayette" ($9.95) are available through the Lafayette Book Store, Conti's Camera Shop and the Chamber of Commerce.

Second, a new book which has received excellent reviews:

"Walnut Creek: Arroyo De Las Nueces," a new illustrated history in cloth binding ($17.95) is available from the author, George Emanuels. Phone him at 939-8644. A resident of Rossmoor, Mr. Emanuels has recorded in an interesting way the history of our neighboring community and has included numerous rare photographs.

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

will be held on Tuesday May 14. You'll get a subsequent bulletin regarding the time, place and speaker. Right now, while it's in your mind, why not mark your calendar?

YOUR NEWSLETTER

If you have any suggestions, any information of local historical interest; if there are any articles or news you would like to share with the members of our Society, this newsletter is your means to do just that. We welcome your participation.

Please send your material to:

LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA - 94549

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Classification: (Circle one)	Student	Family	Business	Life
	$2.50	$5.00	$50.00	$100

SPECIAL INTERESTS: PLEASE CHECK IF YOU CAN HELP

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____ Landmarks
____ Community Observer
____ Oral History
____ Typing
____ Other (describe)

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____ Field Trips
____ Photographs
____ Research
____ Newspaper Clippings
____ Phoning

Name, Address & Phone Number of friends interested in joining:

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_____

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Comments:

Mail to: LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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